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ABSTRACT

The rationale for providing native language materials in school resource libraries is discussed. In 1978, only 0.1 percent of school library collections in Canada were in languages other than French or English. Most English as a Second Language programs are designed to promote students' assimilation into English language society. This orientation impedes the establishment of a foreign language library in the school. In addition, part of the reluctance to use first languages centers around concern over language interference. Recent research has cast doubt upon the validity of this concern. Many authorities are dismissing the interference factor and recommending instruction in the native language as the best route to mastery of a second language. Library acquisition of foreign language material is a slow, expensive process. A shared acquisition program, perhaps on the district level, would partially overcome many of the obstacles to building up a foreign language collection. The educational goal of multiculturalism provides an important rationale for establishing foreign language libraries in the school. (RW)

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First Language Materials In School Libraries

By
J'Anne Greenwood

The presence of large numbers of English as a Second Language (ESL) students in schools, more than 40% of total enrolment in some urban centres, coupled with the federal government's commitment to multiculturalism, raises the question of providing foreign (or "first") language materials in school resource centres, not only for recent immigrants but also for ethnic minorities. The need for such materials in public libraries has long been recognized since members of ethnic communities pay taxes for library service and should, therefore, receive full service. The Toronto Public Library began a systematic multilingual service in 1957 and foreign language collections elsewhere in Canada have benefited from the National Library's multilingual Biblioservice which, since first proposed in 1970, has been providing foreign language materials to public libraries through provincial agencies.

School resource centres, however, have lagged behind. Statistics Canada reported only .1% of school library collections as being in languages other than French or English in 1978, while correspondence with some of the larger urban school districts in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario, where the concentration of ethnic minorities is heaviest, suggest only small pockets of material for the larger groups in selected schools. However, there are signs that the situation is changing. The Vancouver School Board, for example, has recently established large rotating collections of recreational reading materials in eight languages and the B.C. Ministry of Education is preparing a list of suggested materials for school resource centres in languages taught in secondary schools. Vancouver also seems to be the first school board to have gained access to the National Library's Multilingual Biblioservice. Edmonton offers immersion or bilingual programs in German, Hebrew, and Ukranian for English speakers with small collections of library materials in the schools involved. No centralized collection of foreign language materials is planned, but the District ESL Resource Centre is building a collection of bilingual books. In Toronto, two elementary schools have been buying Chinese and Polish books on a minimal budget while several high schools have small collections of recreational materials.

There seems, however, to be some resistance among educators to providing reading materials in first languages in a school setting. Some feel that if use of the mother tongue is encouraged, students will have less incentive to speak and read English and will have more trouble doing so. They will mix less with English-speaking children and the time required for full integration into school and community life will be much longer. While clearly based on some goals of immigrant education, these objections also assume that it is educationally unsound to encourage use of the mother tongue in an essentially English environment. There are, too, practical problems in ordering and using foreign language materials which are of particular concern to teacher-librarians. Several issues need to be examined by teachers, teacher-librarians, and administrators to assess the validity of providing first language materials in school resource centres.

Educational Merit

Most ESL programs are designed for the student to achieve mastery of English and to integrate as rapidly as possible into a society that uses English as a medium of communication. While the days of punishing children for speaking in their own language have officially passed and educators seek to supplement rather than supplant the student's culture, there is, nevertheless, the lingering feeling that encouraging the use of the mother tongue will interfere with the learning of English. Part of this feeling may stem from the fact that second language teaching has depended heavily on the audio-lingual method which views language learning as a set of habits that are mastered by repetition, drills, and over-learning and proscribes use of the mother tongue as interfering with this process. The emphasis on a sound oral language program is not misplaced but the psychological bases of the audio-lingual method have been questioned in recent years and a variety of learning strategies, some of them culturally determined, are now used by second language learners depending on age and other factors.

In fact, research does not confirm this interference theory and casts doubt on the audio-lingual method. " Few errors can be attributed to interference, the first being similar to those made in first language acquisition such as overgeneralization and simplification. Recent experimental evidence suggests that even in adult learners where the mother tongue is

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entrenched and transfer errors are at their peak, only a minority of errors are attributable to interference. Some errors that seem entirely due to first language interference, such as the omission of "s" and "ed" by Oriental speakers which teachers noticed for years, can be viewed as "intra-lingual". A study of morpheme acquisitions by Chinese and Spanish speakers showed that both achieved mastery of the morphemes studied in roughly the same order, despite the fact that for Spanish speakers verb and noun endings are as important as they are in English. The same was found to be true for adult speakers of different languages. A more accurate view sees the first language as an existing system, a set of concepts and experiences, through which the second language is filtered. Good language learners handle the discrepancy between first and second languages well.

Many authorities not only dismiss the interference factor but also recommend instruction in the native tongue as the best route to mastery of a second language:

Recent programs in Europe among immigrants have shown that the host country language was mastered better when children were given lessons in their mother tongue. [18]

Italian children should be gradually inserted into the German school system and elementary education given in the native tongue. [19]

Reading in one's native language, or at least familiarity with the printed word in mother tongue, is recommended as a great deal of the ability to read transfers automatically, and even if the native language and script are entirely unrelated to English the decoding process is the same. [20] Modiano found that children in Mexico who were taught to read first in the vernacular scored significantly higher in Spanish reading after three years than children taught to read only in Spanish, though there was some question as to the effectiveness of the methods used to teach the latter group. [12:393] Some other studies are more cautiously worded. Phillipine children were "not hampered in achievement" if they began reading and instruction in their own language. [12:398] An Australian study of English and Greek speakers in Sydney in 1970 concluded that:

There is essentially no inhibition caused by first language. Differences between the two groups disappeared by Grade 6 whether or not special instruction was provided in English or in Greek. [23]

It is interesting to note that instruction in the native tongue is not advocated as the pluralistic model of immigrant education that one might assume. The majority of programs aim at assimilation to the dominant culture rather than preservation of ethnic differences and their goal is to achieve monolingualism more effectively.

Bilingual French-English programs are a notable exception. The success of immersion programs has been used as an argument against education in the vernacular for minority groups, since these children do extremely well with virtually all instruction in the new language; in fact, they outperform French as a Second Language students. It should be borne in mind, however, that both languages in this case have equal status and that these children are generally from an advantaged socio-economic environment.

There are other reasons put forward for the provision of reading materials in the mother tongue that are not directly related to the transfer of skills. Reading allows older students to develop knowledge in many curricular areas where they now fall behind while English is mastered. For younger children, continued language experience in the mother tongue enriches vocabulary, contributes to concept growth, provides aesthetic experience without which any child is impoverished, and maintains a vital link between home and school environments. For the newly-arrived immigrant, offering recognition of the native language may reduce anxiety and language shock, factors which inhibit language learning, or any learning for that matter. Retention of native language skills may also help to prevent long-term culture stress as reading for cultural identity is very important.

Though empirical tests are lacking, observations are numerous. Actively discouraging someone from maintaining fluency in their own language may lead to "mental confusion". When a person changes ethnolinguistic allegiance he or she may demonstrate confusion and apathy. The rejection of a student's primary language and thus of his or her heritage can seriously affect a child's self-concept and and ability to learn. There is also a danger that depriving a person of the mother tongue gives rise to anomie, a sense of not belonging to either social group.[9]

Use of the mother tongue can increase motivation, create a desirable classroom climate, provide gains in status, or simply give the non-English speaker something to do in the regular classroom. An experimental project in England where one group of five-year-old Punjabi speakers were given instruction in their native language fifty percent of the time and books were provided and read to the children in their native language led to the children settling into the routine of school life more quickly, with other children more forthcoming, and students were no further behind in their academic progress than their peers in the other subgroup. [7] This is a clear contrast with one teacher's observations of five, six, and seven-year-olds in Britain who claimed that their classmate, a Bengali speaker, "couldn't talk at all". [3:63]

Most of the suggestions regarding the use of native language materials suggest a classroom environment, but an equally strong or stronger case can be made for maintaining a collection in the resource centre. The literary heritage of many nations could be shared through special projects and might stimulate recognition of the need for books in English that reflect the experience of ethnic minorities. As Esther Dyer has remarked rather tersely, multiculturalism goes beyond adding a list of ethnic leaders to the social studies curriculum. [11:8] Older students could maintain and extend skills in other curricular areas, acquire research and study skills in a familiar medium, or simply escape for a while from the stresses of adjustment to another language. Neither can the possibilities for community involvement in order-

ing and using foreign language books be overlooked. The provision of first language materials in the school is clearly not educationally disadvantageous.

Practical Considerations

There is no doubt that acquiring foreign language books is "frustratingly slow, expensive and fraught with disappointment". [11] There is a lack of material generally, suitable or not, and few reviewing or selection aids. Teacher-librarians who wish to build a multilingual collection to support the curriculum will be particularly hard-pressed as there may not be any books on certain subjects and what there is may be of dubious quality or politically biased. The generally unattractive physical quality even of recreational reading material in many languages may result in negative discrimination rather than the benefits suggested earlier. Some suggestions have been offered for the problem ot books that fall apart virtually before they are unpacked: they might be pre-bound before shipping if this is possible, or permabound on arrival. The other problems are more intractable.

There are a few selection aids. *Bookbird* selects and annotates foreign language books for children and young adults; *Booklist* has a selection on foreign language books; the International Youth Library in Munich publishes *Best Of The Best* at approximately five year intervals; and UNICEF publishes lists of books in the more obscure languages along with a list of dealers and agents for the more familiar ones. Given the short runs of foreign books, however, titles are usually out of print before the lists appear. Most libraries here and in Europe depend on a combination of publishers' catalogues, ethnic bookstores and organizations, foreign book fairs, book buying trips, lists from other libraries, newsletters, and subject specialists. Wertheimer's *Books In Other Languages: A Guide To Selection Aids And Suppliers* (Canadian Library Association) is an invaluable aid which lists selection tools and suppliers in Canada, the United States, and abroad by language. There is also a section on children's books.

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Booksellers in other countries are usually unwilling to export large quantities of books and for some "the idea of exporting books to another country before receiving payment is an unthinkable risk". [17:41] Harrison cautions against purchasing direct from foreign dealers unless experienced in foreign acquisitions and suggests writing to foreign dealers before ordering. [13:23] The initial cost of foreign books is high and the cost of ordering and shipping can exceed the price of the book itself, whether ordered through a foreign dealer or a local agent. Fluctuating exchange rates are no help either.

Lack of expertise in the language and literature of foreign countries is also a handicap, not only for selection and acquisition but also for cataloguing, shelving, filing, and reader advisory service. Many authors refer to the necessity of relying on kindly-disposed members of the community or cultural organizations to read reviews, translate bibliographic information, prepare annotations, or even to purchase books.

One of the problems cited in a 1979 survey of public libraries in the United States was the low priority given to foreign language materials by cataloguing staff. [3] It is not surprising. Non-Roman alphabets and logographic scripts can present horrendous problems. Transliteration, it has been pointed out, is of little use to the native speaker , and other suggested systems seem impractical for the school resource centre. If the first language collection is to support areas of the curriculum in addition to providing recreational material, subject access of some sort becomes particularly important. Access through browsing may be all some libraries can provide, especially if material is donated, but this is undesirable as a long-term solution. Some suggestions have been offered. For a small foreign language collection, Harrison suggests using a class mark as a symbol for each different language and providing a main entry card in the vernacular with one subject card indicating the language. [13:23] Another possibility is to provide main and added entries in the vernacular, a subject card in English, and a class mark in accordance with the regular classification scheme. Hans Wellisch offers a number of other possibilities in *Bibliographic Access To Multilingual Collections.* [26]

All these problems suggest that if the acquistion of foreign language materials is undertaken it should not be from "a casual interest in exotica", [13:22] and that an individual school is unlikely to have the resoures to meet these difficulties. The conclusion seems inescapable that such services should be provided at least at the district level, and preferably through some cooperative programs between larger districts and library systems. Such a shared program would allow wider access to scarce materials as they could circulate among various schools. Some type of computer-produced union catalogue would also be useful for foreign language materials.

Multiculturalism

One can support the provision of first language materials in the school on grounds that have nothing to do with multiculturalism. It is worthwhile, however to clarify the position of the federal government on multiculturalism in education and see whether this might have any implications for first language collections in school resource centres.

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism recommended that:

(a) The teaching of languages other than English or French and cultural subjects relating to them be incorporated as options in the public elementary school program where there is sufficient demand for such classes;

(b) special instruction in the appropriate official language be provided for children who enter the public

school system; that provincial authorities specify the terms and conditions of financial assistance for such special instruction and that federal authorities assist the provinces in mutually acceptable ways through grants for additional cost incurred; and (c) more advanced instruction and a wider range of options in languages other than English and French and in cultural subjects related to them be provided in high schools where there is sufficient demand for such classes.

The government response to these recommendations was positive and the provinces were urged to consider them. The government also planned "to discuss with the provinces and cultural groups ways of assisting in the development and duplication of new teaching aids for languages and cultures other than English and French". [1:7] There seems no reason why the federal government should be encouraged by the provincial ministries to fund foreign language collections to supplement such collections of teaching aids.

It should be noted that there is no intention in the government's multicultural policy of replacing the teaching of the official languages. It is hard to envisage taxpayers accepting the financial burdens involved or educators and parents accepting the surrender of other parts of the curriculum. The teaching of English or French is seen as "developing a strong self-image that makes the young student proud of his immigrant culture... acquainting (him/her) with the culture of other groups... in the community so that one day... that young student would be at home in his own as well as in the broader Canadian society". This is in contrast to the assimilationist view which makes students fluent in the official language but may lead to "estrangement between generations raising a host of new social problems and psychological disturbances". [6:199-200] Although the recommendations have been implanted only to a certain extent, they are being discussed with increasing frequency in various provinces and where implemented should affect considerably the extent and nature of school library collections.

Conclusion

There are many arguments put forward for the provision of foreign language materials in school libraries. A 1977 policy statement of the Library Association in Britain declares:

"The argument for the provision of books for children in their mother tongue is overwhelming. It seems foolish to encourage children to throw away a skill that is part of their natural inheritance." [27:347-8]

There are some indications, however, that our monolingual educational policies have been all too successful. A child may reject books in the native tongue if he "considers his first culture inferior", [21] and there is some evidence that use of foreign language books in public libraries in Toronto is decreasing despite improved programs and increased collections, partially because children adapt so quickly to the English-speaking environment. [27:344] Where does this leave the administrator and teacher-librarian? Although the extent to which multiculturalism will affect the schools is still hazy, it can be concluded that the provision of first language materials, while difficult, may have considerable benefits. How many of these benefits will materialize, in what is still an essentially assimilationist environment, can only be determined by careful planning, implementation, and evaluation of such projects.

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